

PREPARING FOR THAT AMAZING WEBSITE

INTRODUCTION

The key to a great website, one that viewers find easy to use, lies in careful preparation. The more time spent in planning and designing, the less time and money will be needed on costly adjustments and corrections to your website. To assist in planning your website we have developed a two-part guide. This article is the first of two (The second article is " Designing That Fabulous Website"). The two articles will help you understand what is needed when considering contracting a website to be designed and built for your organisation.

The suggestions contained in these articles will help you maximise the value of any initial discussion you have with your preferred website designer.

PLANNING YOUR SITE

DEFINE YOUR GOALS

Define the goals for your website (e.g. brand identity; shareholder information; staff communication; generate sales leads, educate potential buyers, attract qualified traffic). Consider your expectations for the website. Does the planned site mesh with your marketing (or business) plan? How will you measure successful attainment of your goal? What is the timeframe (ie start and completion dates) for the website?

Likewise for each page, decide on its purpose - this makes it so much easier when preparing content for a page. For example, the purpose of the Home page (the page most viewers see first) could be: "To provide an overview of the services and products offered" and "To draw viewers further into the website for more information."

DECIDE ON THE TARGET AUDIENCE

Who will be the main users of the website: shareholders, investors, staff, customers, suppliers, or potential clients? Determine their expectations and how a website will meet these. Focus your first site on the organisation's primary audience. Later you can widen the site's appeal to other audiences.

What do you expect website visitors to do: browse for information, subscribe to an e-mail newsletter, place an order, understand why your services/products are superior to the competitions, contact the organisation for more information, access forms, download documents, etc.?

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ESTABLISH THE STYLE OF THE WEB SITE

First impressions count. Establish the style of your website: one that reflects your organisation's and/or brand image. Is a corporate image required? A fun site? A colourful site? A technical site? View other sites, including competitors, for ideas. Ensure that your offline and online identities match.

DECIDE WHAT TO PLACE ON THE WEB SITE

Decide what you want displayed on the website. For the firm's first website, make extensive use of existing information (annual reports, news releases, brochures, advertising etc.). This will help ensure the style of the site reflects the desired image, reduces the time required to establish a site, and helps to control costs. Make sure that the information is of benefit/interest to customers.

See also the "Designing That Fabulous Website" article, for suggestions on general content and layout considerations.

REVIEW

Once you are happy with the layout and the content, then review the content - see if it can be halved and yet still provide sufficient information for the viewer. Quality not quantity is the catchword. Ensure that others, including users are involved in the review. Resist the temptation to continually add more: more pages and more features.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to having a website built, you need a Domain Name (ie a website address eg www.yourcompany.co.nz) and a host computer where the website is stored. In both cases Optimum Websites is happy to help clients with the selection process.

DOMAIN NAME

Prior to establishing an Internet presence, the website must have registered a domain name. Do you need a NZ one, an Australian one or an international domain name? In part, your target audience and the long-term goals for the business will drive the answer.

Before registering a name, there are some actions to take:

1. Decide on two or three potential names. For an understanding of the New Zealand domain name structure go to <http://www.dnc.org.nz>
2. Check the availability of the name(s) by using a domain name search site. Try this site: <http://www.nz11.com/domain.htm> It enables you to search for particular extensions and counties (eg .co.nz .net.nz .org.nz .com.au .com).

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3. Ask Optimum Websites to arrange for your domain name to be registered (Done is association with [NZL1.com](http://nzl1.com). Alternatively, you can arrange registration yourself or ask your website host to do so.

WEB SITE HOST

There are dozens of companies in New Zealand, which host websites. When investigating which company to use, consider:

1. Is it possible to match the size of your site to the amount of disc space hired for the website? That is to say, is disk space provided in graduated amounts? There is little point in paying for disk space that you do not need.
2. Are there limits on the amount of Internet traffic (used by people accessing your website)?
3. How many e-mail accounts (and aliases) are permitted?
4. Do they provide or allow CGI script"? This is required if the website is to be used to, for example, collect information via a form, have a hit counter, a guest book.
5. Will they register a domain name for your website?
6. What types of site statistics available and do they mean anything useful?

N.B. Quite often, the selection of a web host company is left to the web designer as they have a good appreciation of what is required. Indeed, this is a free service provided to our clients (We use and recommend NZL1.com. Their website address is <http://www.nzl1.com>).

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions about designing a website (or any other aspect of a website), please contact the author. Telephone 64 4 383 8086 or 027 460 3902 and ask for Pierre Woolridge. Alternatively, he can be e-mailed at enquiries@optimumwebsites.co.nz